

THIS LAND IS MY LAND AND THAT LAND IS YOUR LAND

GENESIS 31:1-55 AUGUST 17, 2022

Anaxagoras was a philosopher who lived about 500 years before Christ. He is called “founder of monotheism in Europe” by academics both ancient and modern who ignore the Bible.¹ He’s also credited with this phrase: “If you cheat me once, it’s your fault; if you fool me [twice], it’s mine.”²

After 20 years in Haran, Jacob is done being cheated. But going home wouldn’t be as simple as packing up and heading out. He and Laban were like a couple of crooks whose partnership was based on what they each could get from the other, not honor or loyalty. It was only a matter of time before these two schemers’ conspiracies would boil over, and in Genesis 31 it happens. In the end, Jacob and his family finally break free from Laban’s cruelty, but it’s a very close call.

Genesis 31:1-2 - Now Jacob heard what Laban’s sons were saying: “Jacob has taken all that was our father’s and has built this wealth from what belonged to our father.”² And Jacob saw from Laban’s face that his attitude toward him was not the same as before.

Laban had stolen all the speckled and spotted animals in violation of their deal. Jacob bred the strong animals for himself and the weak ones for Laban’s flocks. There was only so long everyone could keep all the undermining secret. Now, six years after they made the deal, things had become obvious. Laban’s sons weren’t happy, neither was Laban. I can’t imagine he and Jacob were ever on very *friendly* terms, but their fragile peace was falling apart and you could see it on Laban’s face.

Jacob became a wealthy man, but because he had spent this long detour outside of the place where God wanted him, he could not say (like his grandfather Abraham), “I have raised my hand in an oath to the Lord, God Most High...that I will not take a thread or sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, ‘I made Abram rich.’³ There was a challenge, an asterisk.

Genesis 31:3 -³ The Lord said to him, “Go back to the land of your ancestors and to your family, and I will be with you.”

Scholars tell us that where it says Laban’s face was not the same, the Hebrew literally says, “Laban’s face was not with Jacob.”⁴ But, in that moment of rejection and isolation, as always, here is the Lord making Himself known, reminding Jacob that He was always present.

There’s an opposite thing happening here. It’s like a reboot of a classic movie. In Genesis 12, God spoke to Abram in this very same land - Haran - and said, “Leave the land of your ancestors, leave your family and go where I show you.” Now, Jacob is told, “Go *back* to your ancestral land, go *back* to your family. Get *back* to that place I showed your grandfather and your father.”

¹ <https://academia-lab.com/enciclopedia/anaxagoras-en/>

² <https://en.alazaheer.net/anaxagoras-contributions-and-15-famous-phrases/>

³ Genesis 14:22-23

⁴ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

God has a well established place and plan for your life. He has provided a great amount of information and revelation, and the presence of His indwelling Holy Spirit. We have been shown the way to go. The question is not what the way is, but whether we will trust and obey.

Genesis 31:4-9 - ⁴ Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field where his flocks were. ⁵ He said to them, "I can see from your father's face that his attitude toward me is not the same as before, but the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You know that with all my strength I have served your father ⁷ and that he has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God has not let him harm me. ⁸ If he said, 'The spotted sheep will be your wages,' then all the sheep were born spotted. If he said, 'The streaked sheep will be your wages,' then all the sheep were born streaked. ⁹ God has taken away your father's herds and given them to me.

Here we see that loveliest of Bible phrases: *But God*. Laban is combative, Laban is a cheat, Laban stands in the way, *but God*. All these years, all these difficulties, *but God* was present with him and God provided for him and God protected him.

Jacob finally looks back over twenty years and realizes what the Lord has done. It all comes into focus and he sees that God's presence is and has been a constant reality.⁵

One of Jacob's sadder phrases is, "You know that with all my strength I have served your father." What a waste. Not, "With all my strength I have served the Lord," or, "with all my strength I have served *my* father, Isaac," but this spiteful, loveless pagan. Our masters matter. Who are we spending our strength on? What masters? What pursuits? What desires?

Genesis 31:10-13 - ¹⁰ "When the flocks were breeding, I saw in a dream that the streaked, spotted, and speckled males were mating with the females. ¹¹ In that dream the angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' and I said, 'Here I am.' ¹² And he said, 'Look up and see: all the males that are mating with the flocks are streaked, spotted, and speckled, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. ¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you poured oil on the stone marker and made a solemn vow to me. Get up, leave this land, and return to your native land.' "

Like Abraham, Jacob heard God's call but hesitated in Haran. The Lord was faithful to call again. But, on a relational level, it's a little sad - the Lord had to re-introduce Himself. "Hey, remember Me? I'm the God who appeared to you at Bethel...you know...the One you made a big vow to."

God spoke to Abraham seven times in Genesis. When He did, the Lord would talk to Abraham like you would to a friend, because they *were* friends. Jacob isn't really a friend yet. And he hasn't kept his vow. The Lord reminds him it's time to do so. After all, when was Jacob going to get around to it? He's already over 100 years old and he seems to have forgotten the promise he made. God cares about us making good on our promises to Him.

⁵ John Golldingay *Genesis (Baker Commentary On The Old Testament Pentateuch)*

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 - ⁴ **When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because he does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow.** ⁵ **Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it.**

Genesis 31:14-16 - ¹⁴ **Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Do we have any portion or inheritance in our father's family? ¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as outsiders? For he has sold us and has certainly spent our purchase price. ¹⁶ In fact, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. So do whatever God has said to you."**

A theme of this passage is that Jacob's family - God's people - are *distinct* from the rest of the world. It begins here: Rachel and Leah say, "We are *outsiders*" or your version may say "strangers." They felt it *emotionally*, but it's a reminder to us of something that is true, *spiritually*. If you are born again, you are no longer a citizen of this earth. You are a stranger, an outsider, an alien to the unbelieving world. In 1 Peter and Hebrews we are identified as strangers and sojourners on earth.

If that sounds like a lonely life, being a stranger to the world, like David Banner thumbing it down the highway, be encouraged that Christianity does not *end* in exile. The Apostle Paul explains the *other* side of this stranger life:

Ephesians 2:19 - ¹⁹ **So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household**

In the custom of the times, Laban should've provided his daughters with money when they were given as wives.⁶ But, he not only cheated Jacob, he cheated his own flesh and blood.

Genesis 31:17-21 - ¹⁷ **So Jacob got up and put his children and wives on the camels. ¹⁸ He took all the livestock and possessions he had acquired in Paddan-aram, and he drove his herds to go to the land of Canaan, to his father Isaac. ¹⁹ When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household idols. ²⁰ And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, not telling him that he was fleeing. ²¹ He fled with all his possessions, crossed the Euphrates, and headed for the hill country of Gilead.**

We're not given Rachel's motivation. These idols were probably what Laban used for divination, so maybe she was trying to keep him from finding them. Maybe she was clinging to some idolatry of her own. Or maybe she was acting spitefully, having never forgiven her dad for what he did on her wedding night 20 years ago.⁷ No matter why, it's going to cause some big trouble, in fact, that *may* have been the factor that sent Laban over the edge into a murderous frenzy. And it was a big risk. According to the Code Of Hammurabi, such an act would have been a capital crime.⁸

⁶ Rober Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

⁷ These theories are represented by Waltke, W.H. Griffith Thomas, and A.W. Pink

⁸ Waltke

Genesis 31:22-24 - ²² On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. ²³ So he took his relatives with him, pursued Jacob for seven days, and overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night. "Watch yourself!" God warned him. "Don't say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

Laban gets his sons, his brothers, maybe the whole clan, and they arm themselves and ride *hard* for 300 hundred miles to catch Jacob.⁹ Based on what God said and what Laban himself will say, his intent was *clearly* to do Jacob and the family harm. But the night before the fight, God appears to Laban and I love what He says: "*Watch yourself.*" It was enough to scare Laban into obedience, as it had been for Pharaoh and Abimelech. Derek Kidner points out that all three of the patriarchs had to be "ingloriously extricated" from a mess they got themselves in.

In the Old Testament we see a lot of these kind of Divine dreams. Why doesn't that happen more today? God still *can* speak in a dream, but we have something so *much* better: 66 Books of reliable, infallible, inerrant inspiration. Compared to the clarity and power of the Scripture, do you *really* want to rely on a dream? Since my stroke, my dreams have been absolutely crazy. I'm glad I can go to the Living Word, rather than have to wade through a hazy dream.

Genesis 31:25-30 - ²⁵ When Laban overtook Jacob, Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban and his relatives also pitched their tents in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶ Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me and taken my daughters away like prisoners of war! ²⁷ Why did you secretly flee from me, deceive me, and not tell me? I would have sent you away with joy and singing, with tambourines and lyres, ²⁸ but you didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters. You have acted foolishly. ²⁹ I could do you great harm, but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Watch yourself! Don't say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' ³⁰ Now you have gone off because you long for your father's family—but why have you stolen my gods?"

Laban talks a big game - he's a windbag - but don't think for a minute that he loved his daughters and grandchildren. In the same breath where he talks about kissing them, he says, "I could do *you* great harm," using the plural word for "you."¹⁰ His intention was to hurt them all.

He asks, "Why have you stolen my Elohim?" Remember, that's not a proper name for God, it's a generic term for divine beings. But what a wonderful, exciting, important reminder that *our* God cannot be packed up. He is not carved from wood or stone. He is not made in our image. No, He is *all-powerful*, He is *immutable*, He is *unique*, and He is *matchless* in every way.

Genesis 31:31-35 - ³¹ Jacob answered, "I was afraid, for I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. ³² If you find your gods with anyone here, he will not live! Before our relatives, point out anything that is yours and take it." Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the idols. ³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, and the tents of the two

⁹ *Ellicott's Commentary For English Readers*

¹⁰ Waltke

concubines, but he found nothing. When he left Leah's tent, he went into Rachel's tent.

³⁴ Now Rachel had taken Laban's household idols, put them in the saddlebag of the camel, and sat on them. Laban searched the whole tent but found nothing. ³⁵ She said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I am having my period." So Laban searched, but could not find the household idols.

In one moment, Laban declares his loving affection for his daughters and grandkids. In the next he's ransacking all their stuff.

Jacob had no idea Rachel had stolen the little teraphim, and in his anger makes a rash vow. Had they been found, Rachel may have been executed and Jacob could've been brought back as a slave, shamed before the entire clan. Don't make rash vows. It doesn't work out. We have many examples in the Bible of rash vows and their bad consequences.

Genesis 31:36-37 - ³⁶ Then Jacob became incensed and brought charges against Laban. "What is my crime?" he said to Laban. "What is my sin, that you have pursued me? ³⁷ You've searched all my possessions! Have you found anything of yours? Put it here before my relatives and yours, and let them decide between the two of us.

Laban hasn't said anything about the flocks. Despite Laban's efforts, all Jacob's wealth was rightfully earned. You could look right at his herds to see the proof. No doubt, six years ago Laban had laughed with his buddies about how he was gonna cheat his son-in-law - how he had removed all the animals he promised to give and how there was no hope for Jacob to build a flock of his own. But the Lord was on Jacob's side. And now Jacob brings charges against Laban before the clan.

Genesis 31:38-42 - ³⁸ I've been with you these twenty years. Your ewes and female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams from your flock. ³⁹ I did not bring you any of the flock torn by wild beasts; I myself bore the loss. You demanded payment from me for what was stolen by day or by night. ⁴⁰ There I was—the heat consumed me by day and the frost by night, and sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹ For twenty years in your household I served you—fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks—and you have changed my wages ten times! ⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, certainly now you would have sent me off empty-handed. But God has seen my affliction and my hard work, and he issued his verdict last night."

Jacob went above and beyond what hired shepherds normally did, partly because Laban demanded it, but also to be blameless when it came to his work. You may not like your job, that's ok. But, as a Christian, do it as unto the Lord and go above and beyond what you *have* to do. It will yield spiritual benefits. That way of life worked well for Daniel and his friends. Peter said:

1 Peter 3:16 - ¹⁶ Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

Laban had cheated Jacob. That was common knowledge. God does not like it when people short those who work for them. Be fair, be generous, do what's right in regard to payments.

Genesis 31:43-44 - ⁴³Then Laban answered Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters; the children, my children; and the flocks, my flocks! Everything you see is mine! But what can I do today for these daughters of mine or for the children they have borne? ⁴⁴Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I. Let it be a witness between the two of us."

Anaxagoras is also attributed with this quote: "'Men would live incredibly calm if these two words, *mine* and *yours*, were removed.'" Laban throws a tantrum. He's humiliated as his business practices are shown to be indefensible, his idol-theft accusation appears to be totally made up, and his own daughters who he's saying he's rescuing, *clearly* side with their husband. He's completely out of touch with the situation. He wasn't rescuing his daughters. God was saving this family *from him!* But, looking around, he sees he's beaten. And he's afraid of this God who invades dreams and overcomes schemes.

Genesis 31:45-50 - ⁴⁵So Jacob picked out a stone and set it up as a marker. ⁴⁶Then Jacob said to his relatives, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a mound, then ate there by the mound. ⁴⁷Laban named the mound Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob named it Galeed. ⁴⁸Then Laban said, "This mound is a witness between you and me today." Therefore the place was called Galeed ⁴⁹and also Mizpah, for he said, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are out of each other's sight. ⁵⁰If you mistreat my daughters or take other wives, though no one is with us, understand that God will be a witness between you and me."

Laban has the audacity to tell Jacob, "I'm not allowing you to marry any other wives. *That* wouldn't be right." When *he's* the one who made Jacob a polygamist in the first place!

The names they give this pile of rocks both mean "Witness heap."¹¹ Laban uses Aramaic, Jacob uses the Canaanite language.¹² Again we see the separation. Moses keeps calling Laban "the Aramean." And here we have two different names, two different deities invoked, two different lands divided by this monument.

Genesis 31:51 - ⁵¹Laban also said to Jacob, "Look at this mound and the marker I have set up between you and me."

You've got to appreciate how self-involved this guy is. He didn't set up the marker, *Jacob did* along with the rest of the people there. But to Laban, the only person that matters is Laban.

Genesis 31:52-54 - ⁵²This mound is a witness and the marker is a witness that I will not pass beyond this mound to you, and you will not pass beyond this mound and this marker to do

¹¹ Waltke

¹² NET Study Bible Notes

me harm. ⁵³The God of Abraham, and the gods of Nahor—the gods of their father—will judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited his relatives to eat a meal. So they ate a meal and spent the night on the mountain.

Some commentators try to suggest that they all had a big, happy meal together. But this is a bitter parting. “You’re a Canaanite, I’m an Aramean. You don’t come this way and I won’t go that way. We’re done.”

To his credit, Jacob would not swear by these false gods, but only by the Fear of his father. Maybe that was a little jab at Laban, reminding him that *he’s* the one who needs to be afraid, lest he offend the One true God Who is fighting on Jacob’s behalf.

Genesis 31:55 - ⁵⁵Laban got up early in the morning, kissed his grandchildren and daughters, and blessed them. Then Laban left to return home.

What sort of affection could they possibly have for him at this point? W.H. Griffith Thomas writes, *“Love expressed so late as this cannot be worth much. It is what we are prepared to do for our loved ones while they are with us, not the kind of things we say of them after they are gone, that is the real test and genuine measure of our affection.”*¹³

Laban goes his way. After seeing a vision of God and hearing His voice, Laban did not fall down in worship like the Philippian jailer. He has too much pride. So he returns back, having wasted the clans’ time, to his godless house to live out his days exposed as a liar and cheat. What a sad commentary on how *hard* a human heart can become. God Himself took the time to speak directly to this man and he immediately turned his back on the Lord. And so, in the end, *he* is judged as the enemy and outsider and sent away empty-handed into darkness.

As chapter 32 opens we’re told: “Jacob went on his way, and God’s angels met him.” What a great contrast showing the blessing and provision and grace of God. Jacob was going the way he was commanded, but with God’s commands come all the promises and benefits that He applies to those who will obey Him.¹⁴

God has called out to you, too, just as He did to Jacob and to Laban. Your choice is whether you’re going to turn toward Him or turn away from Him. Go with God. Obey His commands. Receive His blessings and His provision, knowing that He is with you and He is for you and that He will never leave you on your own.

¹³ W.H. Griffith Thomas *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary*

¹⁴ *ibid.*